

Halo 2: Sidestory: Assault On Genalsus VI

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Summary: SPARTAN-102, Major Daren H. is stationed on the isolated Genalsus IV Orbital Defense Station. With little knowledge of the battles between the Covenant and the other branches of the UNSC Marine Corps, the G-IV ODS continues to operate against the Covenant

1. Bridge Conference

The familiar noise of the loudspeaker echoed throughout the orbital base as SPARTAN-102 strode silently through the hallways to the bridge. Admiral Arnold Guantano removed his cap and scratched the back of his head before turning around to greet the cybernetic warrior.

"Major, how are you?" he asked, placing his cap back on his head.

"I'm tired," replied the SPARTAN. Guantano smiled slightly and pressed a few buttons on the control panel that stood before him.

"Who isn't? Constant assaults by Covenant task forces on our bases on Genalsus VI leads to a tax on emotions, or so says common sense." The Admiral glanced back at the large monitor behind him; the view of the planet smeared with green and blue was a beautiful sight. "With no contact with the other UNSC forces because of the comm jamming that the Covenant's done, I bet they think we're dead. And the last word was that there was only a single other SPARTAN unit left."

"That troubles me greatly," stated the Major. He watched with interest as Guantano pressed a few more buttons and a small holographic projector rose from the metal-plated floor. It pulsed a few times, and a small figure appeared, materializing from the head down. As the feet met the base of the projector, SPARTAN-102 realized that it was an AI manifested in the form of a male.

"We meet again, Admiral. What's the problem this time?" asked the AI, crossing his arms. His voice was cool, calm, and collected, like he had done this many times before.

Guantano smiled slightly. "No problems this time around." SPARTAN-102 cocked his head to the side slightly. "Oh, I apologize. The last time we had to call on Thor was when the hanger bay doors wouldn't stay shut. Quite a predicament, that was."

"Why haven't I heard of this 'Thor' before now?" asked the warrior quizzically.

"He's a top-secret project, along with two other new AI; a one Cortana and a one Amherst. The other two are in the hands of the Earth-side branch of the UNSC. This guy was a present from the bigwigs of the UNSC commandâ€¦ He's been really useful in the past, as this installation is beginning to age."

"I do have a certain affinity for electronic devices, don't I?" stated Thor. "They keep me located in the quick access memory banks, but they don't keep me on call 24/7."

"It's to maintain the ultimate control over our systems. That way, if this installation is taken by Covenant forces, and Thor is captured, we don't have to worry about our technologies being analyzed."

"Unfortunately, Captain, the Covenant has been analyzing our technology since we first went to war with them. Careless Marines leave empty weapons lying around, spare clips in obvious places, and helmets on the ground. With these simple things that we discard without thought, the Covenant can obtain valuable information on our military status." The SPARTAN's voice was dry as he finished, "The helmets and their video data captures provide an excellent encyclopedia when accessed."

"I'm sure they do," replied the Admiral. "Alright, well! We've got another group of Covenant drop ships heading toward the surface of Genalsus VI. From our calculations, they're going to land at Base Six."

"Isn't thatâ€¦?" began the Major.

The Admiral nodded. "Oh yeah. As soon as those Covenant sons of bitches land, they're going to get their asses frozen. Our Marines are going to be complaining about this one for a while."

The Admiral strode over to a display and pointed at several red blips approaching a large blue blip. The radar zoomed out, showing a larger area of land, and then out once more, showing the planet of Genalsus VI.

"As you can see," he said, "the Covenant forces are already prepping for landing. Major, you and four other hardcore Marines will be traveling planet side, where you will plan and carry out an assault on the Covenant invasion force. It's small, and the our base down there should hold out long enough for you to get down there and hit those Covenant bastards from the back."

The Major walked up behind him and tapped the control panel.

"Hopefully those drop ships don't hang around. They can be pretty vicious when they need to be."

"Covenant chatter says they're going to do a recon sweep after the invasion force, if you can call it that, lands. After that, they'll be heading back up to the atmosphere where they'll rendezvous with a large slipspace-enabled carrier," piped up Thor. "If my calculations are correct, we can launch Longswords now and intercept them. The Major's right in that they can be vicious, but if we launch six Longswords, we'll easily overpower them; there's only four."

"Four? That's it? That's all they're sending to attack our base?" asked the Major, looking over his metallic shoulder at the glowing AI.

"Something doesn't feel right, I know," replied Guantano. He clapped his hands and turned to face the SPARTAN. "Alright, let's get this operation underway. Major, carry on."

The Major saluted, snapping to attention, and Admiral Guantano returned the salute. The Major turned on his heel and began removing himself from the bridge. Behind him, he heard Guantano begin giving commands.

"Communications, radio the hanger and the barracks. Have those four Marines ready, the Pelican powered up, and those Longswords ready to launch!"

"Sir!"

2. The Queen Janice

As a SPARTAN unit, highly trained in the art of killing, it was Daren's job to protect the soldiers of the UNSC Marine Corps and the people of Earth itself. If that meant going to an orbital space station over six million miles away from the planet that he loved dearly, Daren was up for it. His strong sense of pride and want for universal justice and freedom from the Covenant's tyrannical religious ordeals ensured that he lived another day to do what he loved to do best: Frag Covenant morons stupid enough to get in his way.

Although he was raised to be a hard ass military tactician, Daren had not totally lost his touch with the human side of the military. Yes, he was very serious about his job, but he had not lost his vulnerability for being "human." He felt compassion, which kept him running, though some of his SPARTAN companions saw it as a weakness. They were cold; if the Fleet Admiral had died, they wouldn't get too upset about it. They would focus on maintaining peace and order until another Fleet Admiral had been chosen then go about their orders. Daren would panic, and he knew it. So did his comrades. But out here in the open, being the only SPARTAN, he had come to disregard his emotions when in battle; there would be plenty of time to grieve after all of the rounds had been shot from his battle rifle.

Daren entered the armory, a huge room with near a million total rounds sorted by weapon type spread throughout it. He strode to one of the many dozens of weapon dispersers, which folded out, and grabbed a battle rifle. He turned around to take several clips, and

continued down the aisle, browsing the weapons selection like a child in a candy store. He picked up a pistol; not a magnum, as powerful as it was. He liked the power, but preferred the MD6's accuracy. Sometimes he wished they had integrated the optical zoom and the HUD link technology in the magnum. He grabbed a few clips for that too. Daren spotted the closest grenade rack and picked up frags and plasmas. If they were going to be assaulting the Covenant from behind, grenades would be useful allies.

The loudspeaker boomed through the room, smashing echoes around the steel walls. Everything was always steel, it was a trend. The only difference in the trend was that sometimes walls, floors, and other miscellaneous items were painted a dull army green.

"SPARTAN-102 report to Hanger 7 immediately, repeat, SPARTAN-102 report to Hanger 7 immediately," the voice said. It sounded kind of excited, like the person behind the voice expected the cybernetic warrior to win yet another battle against the Covenant with ease. Daren wasn't so sure that the battle would be easy. After he had discovered the Admiral's uneasiness about the assault, the Major's mind had kicked into tactical mode. He had thought about every move he could make before his booted feet had hit the ground. If they made an assault on a weak flank, there was the possibility of the Covenant regrouping and assaulting in a deadly force. If he attacked directly from the back, he maintained the element of surprise, but there would be stragglers that would have to be cleaned up.

He didn't have time to think, however. As he entered Hanger 7, six Marines snapped to attention; the four he was to have on his mission, and a pilot and co-pilot. In the background sat one of the toughest dogs to ever enter the Genalsus VI Orbital Defense Station's fleet of ships: The Queen Janice. The Queen as it was referred to by the flight crew, was battle-scarred and pretty beat up, but had flown over two hundred missions, over half of those based at this station. Several hundred feet behind the Queen, the flight crew helped maneuver a Longsword into the hanger's launch bay. Daren saluted half-heartedly as the noise and chatter of the hanger met his hearing sensors.

"Are you all set?" he asked, resting his battle rifle on his shoulder.

The pilot of the Queen stepped forward and smiled. "Lieutenant Ingrid Pamell reporting for duty, Sir. The Queen Janice is stocked, fueled, and ready for a ride!"

"Sir, Private First Class Aaron Chase reporting for the mission. My comrades and I are all ready to roll when you are," stated a hard-ass Marine who stepped forward.

Though they couldn't see it, the Major smiled, as he said, "Well then why the hell isn't the engine running?"

The Pelican barely scraped past a squadron of Longsword fighters as it zoomed through space toward the hulking-yet-beautiful planet. As Lieutenant Pamell adjusted the altitude of the craft, the Major briefed his men.

"Now as you all know, we're going in on the backside of the Covenant force when we go planet side. We'll have the element of surprise, and the Covenant won't know what the hell hit them. Conserve your ammo; we might be stuck in the base for a bit after we finally get in. There, we can radio the Pelican and get out of there. Command says that after that, they're sending in three Pelicans to evacuate the facility, and we're to protect the Pelicans and the base crew if the Covenant wants more."

"So basically our mission is to secure the base and help with the evac, correct?" asked Private Chase.

The Major nodded. "It should be easy if the Covenant follows their usual tactics." The Major was good at reassuring his men, but that feeling of uneasiness still simmered in the pit of his stomach. The Pelican shuddered as it entered the atmosphere of Genalsus VI, and the Major looked forward through the open cabin door to see fire enveloping the nose of the Queen. The heat rose in the bay steadily, then fell almost instantly nearly moments later as the fire disappeared and the snowy white mountains of the northern end of the planet came slowly into view. "Everyone lock and load, I want us to be ready to jump from this bay before the Queen even touches the ground."

The familiar clicks of cartridges entering their slots and hammers being pulled back came to the ears of the warrior as he put his battle rifle down long enough to cock his pistol and put it back into it's waist holster. The Pelican slowed suddenly and began to float downward.

"We're putting down a half mile from the base," came Lieutenant Pamell's voice over the bay's comm. The bay door began to fold down and the Marines rose from their seats. The Major noticed that they were sweating; he checked their stats. None of them had ever been in more than five missions, save for Private Chase. He had been in ten. This wasn't going to be pleasantâ€¦ Daren would have to baby sit instead of focusing on killing the Covenant.

3. Marines: 1, Covenant: 0

The bay door began to open before the Pelican even touched the ground. Heat from the thrusters on the rear of the ship blasted at the ground, torching the blades of grass to a fine ash. The Marines and their leader swiftly disembarked, waved a signal to Lieutenant Pamell, and ran in a steady crouching position toward the nearest brush. The Queen Janice took off, the off-ramp closing back up and the thrusters emitting fire as they burned in the incredibly low altitude. _The worst part about that is that they waste more fuel that way than a battalion of Warthogs driving all day put together_, thought the Major. He ran the calculations of the Warthog's miles to the gallon versus the Pelican's, amused at himself.

"Sir, a comm channel is open for all of us; it's been confirmed as secure. Three thirty-five," came Private Chase's voice over a personal comm-link. The SPARTAN unit didn't bother to respond; he just winked his acknowledgement light on. He raised his battle rifle and zoomed to 2x. He could see Base Six right across a small plain. They would have to wait in this small clump of brush until the Covenant drop ships had deposited their wide range of troops and made

the recon sweep.

"Sir! Covenant drop ships at six o'clock!" came the voice of one of the Marines. Daren shoved himself into the brush better and rolled over on his back. He watched the drop ships as they came up from behind their position and passed directly over the small patch of barren forest. This area was unusual; it was full of fir and pine trees, which the Major hadn't seen more than a few times. He would have loved to take a small amount of time to study the trees, but he shoved the thought from his head and rolled back over.

"Sir, one of the drop ships is damaged," stated Chase over the comm channel. The last of the four drop ships to pass overhead was emitting green sparks from where one of the plasma turrets should have been.

"What the hell? How did that happen? It's fresh damage; irreplaceable plasma weaponry on Covenant ships doesn't spark. They usually seal it off, so that the plasma system cycles the power more effectively," stated Daren, trying to sort out possible causes in his head.

They watched as the drop ships put down about forty yards from the base. The forces unloaded: Grunts, Jackals, and two Elites per drop ship; this was not going to be fun at all. The drop ships hummed loudly as they rose from the ground and accelerated, shooting globules of green plasma at the base. The plasma shattered the columns of concrete that held the energy fence's distributing units, eliminating the only obstacle, apparently, that stood in the way of the small wave of Covenant forces and the imminent destruction of Base Six.

The drop ships disappeared from view, only to come back half a minute later, passing overhead, back in the direction that they had originally come from. The Major leapt up, signaling to his teammates with a NavPoint on their HUDs. He sprinted forward, his men right next to him in a fairly smooth line. He raised his battle rifle, zoomed in on a Grunt with it's back to him, and squeezed off a three-round burst. He saw the bullets penetrate the alien's skull and open the front of his head, colliding with the methane facemask just before he moved to another target. As one of the two bullets ripped through the facemask, it sparked the gas, and the breathing tank strapped to it's back exploded, sending the already-dead alien flying in a trail of fire. Several Jackals turned around, alerting their comrades to the presence of the Marines. An Elite wheeled around on its hoof and sparked an energy sword, charging at full speed toward Private Chase.

Chase dropped his battle rifle and pulled his pistol from its holster. He dodged the swipe and the plasma blade seared through the air, leaving small sparks in its wake. He slammed the pistol into the warrior's gut and unloaded the entire clip, some of the bullets bursting through its back. He grabbed the energy sword as the Elite dropped to its knees and wheeled around, bringing the blade down through the neck of the Elite, severing it and spewing blue blood over Private Chase's uniform. He gasped for air as he hit the ground, and then groped for his rifle. He disengaged the energy sword, slammed a fresh clip into the pistol, and then put it back in its holster. Chase raised his battle rifle and zoomed in to pick his next target.

One of the other Marines, armed with a rocket launcher, fired off two rounds into a group of Covenant, kneeling down to reload quickly. The rockets slammed into the ground, sending shrapnel, dirt, and rocks ripping into the aliens as they flew through the air, flaming. A sniper rifle shot ripped through three methane tanks and sent an entire group of Grunts up in flames. Meanwhile, Chase had dropped another Elite with the energy sword he had acquired, and the Major had smashed through Jackal plasma shields with brute strength to smash the butt of his rifle into their birdlike skulls.

There was still a good amount of Covenant left to kill off, and just as Daren raised his battle rifle to take aim, his HUD flashed red and static washed over his shield. He slammed into the ground and rolled several times, losing hold of his battle rifle. He looked up-only to see a Banshee float toward him.

4. I Can Do That Even Better

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Daren thought futilely of ways to save himself, but his mind drew a blank; he was a goner, and he knew it. He heard Chase shout something over the comm, but he didn't hear, he was in a daze as he realized that he was going to die. The small cannons began to glow brilliantly, as the Banshee drew ever closer. But what should have happened did not.

The Banshee exploded in a brilliant flash of light; fire erupted from the cockpit, and the Banshee ceased to fly toward the stunned SPARTAN. A Longsword fighter whizzed past, encasing itself in the fire of the gently falling Covenant airship for a brief second before pulling up to avoid smashing into the base. It was then that Daren realized how close he and his men were to Base Six, and he leapt up, grabbing his rifle and continuing to engage the enemy.

The Longsword did a U-turn and came whizzing back overhead. The Major glanced over his shoulder for a brief second to find six more fighters engaging three Banshees. The Banshees smashed into the ground, smoldering, and the Longswords patrolled the area. A signal blipped on the Major's HUD: A private comm channel. He opened the link and heard the voice of the commander of the squadron.

"Good to see you're still alive, Sir!" the man shouted. "We thought we'd nearly lost you that time!"

"I've had close calls before, but this was my closest," replied Daren, crouching down. There were only a few Grunts left; he would let his Marines finish the job. "Where'd you guys come from?"

"To the Covenant, we came from hell. To you, we were dispatched from the station when it was alerted to the presence of reinforcements. We came down here but didn't see anything but the drop ships. My wing mate wounded one, but we had to back off; we knew it was critical to your mission to assault the forces with no detection. Then, we made as recon sweep, apparently just in time, eh, Major?"

"Yes indeed. Thank you for the air support. Any word from the station yet as to the ETA of the evac Pelicans?"

"No, not yet Sir, but I'm assuming it will be soon. You had better finish up; I saw some Covenant attempting to infiltrate the base on my way by."

"Alright, thank you, pilot," said the Major.

"Orders, Sir?"

"What? Oh, right. Maintain your current position. Have a steady recon of the area, and patrol this base. If you get any messages from the station, forward them to me immediately."

"Sir! Alright boys, let's go Ghost-1-2-1, blue position!"

The comm channel closed and the Longswords broke formation and applied their thrusters to gain altitude. The Major checked everyone's status. Nobody was wounded, and they were all starting to regroup. Daren opened his private comm channel for the Marines.

"Move up with caution, I have a recon report from one of the Longswords that there are Covenant inside the base. Acknowledge." Their lights winked on and Daren smiled to himself. "Private Chase, report on ammo consumption, if you please."

There was a brief pause as Chase tallied the Marines' ammunition. "Sir, all Marines have expended two battle rifle clips. The rest are

as follows: One clip pistol, one container rocket. All Marines have three available clips of rifle; four of pistol minus one, and the Marine with the rocket launcher is carrying two more containers. Come back."

"Affirmative, ammo consumption report received. Continue to advance."

"Yes, Sir," came Chase's reply. The Major lifted himself from his crouching position and jogged forward. He slammed into the wall, putting his back to it and peeping around the corner. Nothing. He whipped around the corner and hustled toward the entrance of Base Six.

"Caution, Sir, coming up in front of you."

Daren rounded the corner, meeting up with his teammates, who had taken the other side. The thick steel door to the base has shut and locked.

"Frag it."

The Marines moved backward several yards and Private Chase primed and tossed a fragmentation grenade. The small ball of explosives bounced up against the door before hitting the ground and detonating. Nothing had happened to the door; the grenade hadn't even scratched it. There were no visible control panels.

"How the hell can the Covenant get in there and we can't? It's our damn base!" exclaimed one Marine.

"Take it easy," said Chase. He moved closer to inspect the door. "It opens upwards. There aren't two smaller doors making one. Someone get something to slide under it; we can pry it up."

"That won't work," stated the Major, indicating the seamless bottom of the door. "What the hell is up with this?"

There came a large hissing sound from his right, and he turned around to find one of the Marines standing in front of an open doorway. "Trick door," he said, smiling. Suddenly, he flung himself to the side and a small blue blotch appeared in the doorway.

"Sticky!" yelled the Marine closest to him as he dove backward. The plasma grenade exploded in a blue flash of light, and the Marine next to the door screamed in anguish. The Major dropped his battle rifle and, turning to the Marine holding it, grabbed the rocket launcher. He primed it and jumped horizontally across the doorway, firing a rocket into the room beyond. The sound of the detonation met the ears of the Marines, who sprung into action swiftly, covering the doorway as the Major rolled, got up, and fired the other rocket into the room. It slammed against the concrete wall and exploded with great force, sending an Elite flying through the doorway, gushing blue blood, and sent several Grunts splattering in to the walls.

"Clear!" Private Chase rushed into the room, spraying rifle fire into the few remaining Grunts. The Major checked the status of the Marine; he was dead.

"Guess we'll never know how he got the door open," the SPARTAN smiled

to himself. He closed the Marine's eyes, retrieved his rifle, and strode into the room. Chase was setting a small breaching charge on a much thinner door. The Marines moved back.

"Clear!" he shouted, and detonated the charge. The door flew open with the brute force of combustion, and the Marines stormed into the next room. There was only one Grunt; a Marine bashed its skull in with his rifle, picked it up, and flung it into the wall.

"Overkill," stated the Major. "I like it." The Marines chuckled, and the Major attempted to pick up a useable comm channel for the base. After scanning multiple times, he found nothing. "The Covenant must have destroyed the Communications center. Split up. One with me, Private Chase, you take the other man. If you find any survivors, contact me immediately.

Static crackled over Daren's comm channels. He accessed an active one and waited for a reply. The voice of the Longsword squadron commander floated in.

"Sir, ETA of evac is five minutes, copy?"

"Copy, ETA five minutes."

"Sir, I recommend that you be ready before then. The station's running a tight schedule; there's a Covenant transport attempting to enter Slipspace, and they need all of their ships, even Pelicans, to bring it down."

"Copy, thanks for the info," replied the Major.

"No problem, Sir. See you in five." The comm channel closed, and the Marines split up. The Marine accompanying the Major didn't say anything. Daren saw in his eyes the hell of war; the man had obviously witnessed great horrors in his first five missions. Although this mission was easy, the stress was enough to make every mission hard, and there was nothing that could be changed about that. Daren pressed on, checking every room.

"ETA two minutes," came the voice of the man behind him. Daren glanced back at him. He was smiling; apparently he would be happy to get out and back to the station.

"Can't wait to get out of here, can you Marine?"

"No Sir, can't wait at all, though I'm probably going to be suited up to man a Longsword when I get back."

"You a pilot, Marine?"

"Yes Sir, the best there never was." Daren laughed slightly. He remembered John, who never laughed, and thought of what a pity it was that he didn't. Then again, John might have been dead by now; Daren had no way of knowing.

"It's true, Marineâ€¦| The UNSC has seen very few good pilots."

"You know that move the Lieutenant pulled off when we left the station? The one where she shot right between those Longswords? I can

do that even better, pull off a spin and everything."

"That skill could come in handy," said the SPARTAN. A sudden comm link opened from Private Chase.

"Sir, we've found the survivors. About twenty of them, only four were killed in the assault."

"Excellent. We have one minute to ETA; bring them up and out to the surface."

"Copy, Sir." Daren turned to the Marine behind him.

"Let's get the hell out of here."

The Marine smiled widely. "Yes Sir!"

The Pelicans were ready to go before the Marines and their SPARTAN leader had even left the base. The Longsword fighters had returned, and were looping around the base, keeping an eye on things. The survivors and the dead were loaded onto one Pelican, and the Marines and the Major were loaded onto another. The thrusters pulsed and flared, and the craft took off from the ground. The engines flooded with power as the Pelicans slammed into the atmosphere, breaking the sound barrier, as they pressed onward into space. Flames enveloped the craft, and the Major glanced out the cockpit to see the Longswords whip past them.

"Old things are slower than death when they're entering space, Sir!" the Private handling the craft yelled over the monotone roar of fire. "There isn't anything we can do to modify it, either! The Pelicans were designed for transport, not for speed and stability!"

"Too bad, too!" shouted the Major. "We could use an upgrade on The Queen Janice!" The Marines roared with laughter, pleased that they had completed their mission and were on the way back home. They pushed the thoughts of their dead comrade into the backs of their minds. It would only last for a little while. That Marine had been somebody's son, somebody's friend, and somebody's father. Daren knew that Private Chase would have to do the honors of writing a letter to his family, though they could not send it.

The Pelican broke through the atmosphere and entered space. The Major glanced forward out the cockpit window, then did a double take. What he saw stunned him. "What the hellâ€¦!"

The Marines strapped in behind him undid their buckles and harnesses, standing slightly to stretch their legs. Private Chase came up behind the Major and his jaw dropped. In the middle of the field of space near the station, a giant Slipspace rupture glowed brilliant off-white. Emerging from the rupture was a gigantic Covenant battleship.

"No. No way. This can't be happening. What the hell does an insignificant little planet have to do with their quest for Earth!" shouted Chase.

"Destruction," said the Major, in awe. "They're hell-bent on destroying us, and apparently the glassing of Genalsus VI is just a stepping stone on their journey to Earth."

"This can't be happening!"

"Wake up, Private. It is."

5. Protocol

"All units stand by! Communications, report!"

"Sir, we've got multiple streams of Covenant chatter. I'm transferring them to Thor now."

"Good! Weapons, report!"

"Sir, the Mack Gun is online, as are all other defensive and offensive weapons. The barracks are being emptied of able pilots, and forty Longsword fighters are able to launch at this moment. Two Pelicans and a squadron of seven Longswords have just arrived. The Pelicans are nearly done docking, and the Longswords are refueling at the outer refueling station."

"Excellent. Radio down to the hanger, I want SPARTAN-102 called to the bridge immediately."

"Sir!" The Marine swiveled around in his chair and sent a message down to the hanger promptly.

"Thor, display." Admiral Guantano stepped up to the recon screen as Thor put the translated Covenant chatter up. "Ah shit. Ah shit, shit, shit!" He slammed his fist against the display; it pulsed. "This isn't good!" He continued to read the translated messages being sent back and forth between Covenant ships.

Several minutes later, the Major appeared on the bridge, saluting. Admiral Guantano didn't bother to salute back. This wasn't the time for pleasantries. "Admiral, what's going on?"

"Major, we are going to be attacked. Covenant chatter translated by Thor states that first the Covenant battleship is going to take us out, then concentrate all their firepower onto the planet."

"They're not?"

"Yes, Major. They're going to glass Genalsus IV, and we can't do anything to stop them. Not at this rate. Do you know that half of our forces are down on that damned planet? We couldn't put up a decent fight if we wanted to. There are only forty Longswords ready for launch at this time, and the Pelicans can do very little to help. Major, we are screwed."

"It might appear that way, Sir, if we don't calm down and think," stated Daren calmly. The Admiral's face contorted into anger and he stepped right up to the SPARTAN.

"What are you implying?"

"Absolutely nothing, Sir."

"Bullshit, you're doubting my command! What would you do then,

Major" He ground his teeth together and clenched his fists.

Daren knew he was risking his career by doing this. "Sir, I would concentrate on the defense of this orbital station and use smart tactics that the Covenant could never maneuver past to take out their battleship."

Admiral Guantano stepped back. "It amazes me, sometimes, how your mind thinks. Defense!"

"Sir!"

"Concentrate a quarter of our power on the shielding system! Weapons, channel another quarter of our power on our weapons systems!"

"Sir!" cried out both men simultaneously. Guantano came back to face the Major.

"I sure as hell hope you know what you're doing."

"Give me full command over our forces, and I can assure you a victory and a Covenant battleship."

"Impossible."

"Not at all, Sir."

Guantano sighed and thought for a second. He shook his head. "Do it."

The Major saluted and moved to the Communications deck. He tapped the Marine manning the deck on the shoulder and juted his thumb to the side. The Marine, a Corporal, nodded and stood, stepping to the side. Daren pressed a few buttons, and the familiar noise of the loudspeaker initiating could be heard as it echoed throughout the station. The Major leaned into the microphone.

"This is SPARTAN-102. As of this moment, Admiral Guantano has reappointed the position of Chief of War of this orbital defense installation to myself. I believe that with a firmly calm attitude and superior tactics, we can defeat this new Covenant force. At this time, a quarter of this station's power has been redirected to the shielding system, and another quarter has been redirected to the weapons systems. We will attack and subdue this new threat, or we will die trying. If you do not agree with my approach, you can shoot yourself now."

The Major stepped away from the microphone, punched a button, and strode back to the Admiral.

"Quite a way you have with the masses," said the Admiral grimly.

"I don't sugarcoat things. It's not in my protocol."

"Your protocol isn't real. I hope you realize that."

"My protocol was driven into my head since I was a child. After time, I figured out early that if I didn't follow the protocol that they taught me, I would not survive. You see, Admiral, it has to be real. I would have died already if it weren't."

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"If you do not agree to my approach, you can shoot yourself now." Private Chase, who had been cleaning his battle rifle through the entire announcement smiled slightly at this. He knew how the Major worked now. That hard-ass outer shell, but with a soft center. His training had taught him the same thing, not to let his emotions get in the way.

He slapped the towel down on the table that he sat at, then stood and proceeded to the armory. He equipped himself to be part of a boarding party. When the Major had mentioned subduing instead of destroying the enemy, Chase knew exactly what he meant.

Private Attens walked through the door, placing his battle rifle in a small heap of used weapons. Chase looked up and cocked his head to the side. "Not going aboard, Attens?"

"Nope. Like I told the Major, when I got back they'd set me up to pilot a Longsword. All I can carry with me is a magnum and two frags." He frowned at the selection of pistols as he pawed through them.

"What's it like working with the Major?" asked Chase slowly, concentrating on replacing the barrel of an otherwise fine shotgun he had found.

"He's a good man. Not like what people say about them SPARTANs."

"That's strange."

"What? Why?"

"I met another SPARTAN. Nobody knew his name except the officers of the ship. He was known as the Master Chief, and he was a cold, hard, killing machine. The Covenant called him the 'Demon.' He's a one-man army."

"I'm sure the Major is no different. I heard they went to the same boot camp and everything."

"That's classified," came a harsh voice from the open doorway. The two Marines looked up to see the Major standing there, leaning against the doorframe. They snapped to and saluted somewhat hesitantly.

"Sir! I apologize Sir!" stammered Attens.

The Major waved his hand. "It's no big deal. Are they putting you on pilot like you said they would?"

"Yes, Sir. It's not right."

"You'll be pleased to know that you'll have an objective this time. That battleship does not have shields, and if it does, they're not very strong. There are two disadvantages to a Covenant battleship:

The shields are little or nonexistent due to the amount of energy needed to man their guns, and there are several weak points ripe to be punctured by our boarding craft. Your mission is to direct your flight team in a concentrated assault on a spot behind and under the bridge." The SPARTAN handed a data pad to Attens. It displayed blueprints and a 3D render of a Covenant battleship.

"Sir?"

"Let me finish. This spot is actually a hatch that blows off when the Covenant on the bridge need an escape route. From this large bay, a Slipspace-enabled lifepod punches out. Do you understand?"

"Yes Sir, puncture the battleship's bridge lifepod bay and secure a clear entrance for the boarding party."

"Exactly. Suit up; your wingmen are waiting for you in the hanger."

"Sir!" Attens saluted crisply, grabbed the best-looking magnum, and was out the door in a flash. The Major turned to Private Chase.

"You assume you're going to be on the boarding party?" he asked. Private Chase nodded. "You assume correctly. Shotguns and SMGs; we've got fifteen other men on their way up here. Make sure they're suited up correctly and someone has C4."

"Yes, Sir!"

The Major left the armory carrying his weapons; he didn't have time to put everything on properly. He made his way back to the bridge to find that Attens' Longswords had been launched only moments before.

"I hope you know what the hell you're doing," stated Admiral Guantano as the Major sat down next to him at the center display. Daren nodded silently and focused on the Longswords. He looked over to Communications.

"Have the boarding ships ready to go. I want them ready to launch the moment I get to the hanger."

"Yes Sir," replied the Communications Officer, who linked up with the hanger immediately.

6. An Unexpected Enemy

"Red twenty-two, this bastard's red hot!" shouted Attens over the comm channel. He barrel rolled out of the way of the Covenant battleship's cannon as it fired off a shining oval of green plasma. The shot streaked through space until it collided with the station, breaking off a large chunk the barracks. "Goddamn! All fighters, pull up and out, let's try to hit them from the side!"

The Longswords pulled back, shooting through space at weird angles until they finally righted themselves. Their stolen Covenant technology ripped plasma through the darkness, colliding with the ship just below the bridge.

"Watch it everyone, we do not want to hit the bridge! It'll ruin the Major's plans!" The Longswords screamed around the bridge and made a U-turn. They accelerated, as a group, and began to fire upon the lifepod hatch at the back of the ship. Smoke trailed from it as a large sheet of purple Covenant metal blew off the ship and floated swiftly down to the battleship's engines, where it was incinerated.

"Alright everyone, pull back and assault the battleship's hangers. There are five on each side, let's go!" Attens opened a secure comm channel with the station. "Station, this is Red twenty-one, come back." Static engulfed the channel, but the Private heard a faint reply. "We have blown the hatch. Repeat, we have blown the hatch, over."

Shhhh..ccchâ€|.shhhâ€| "Affirmative Red twenty-one. Attack the hangers of the ship and come on home."

"Rodger station!" Attens closed the channel. "Let's go boys, let's finish up!"

"Launch!" The two UNSC boarding craft launched, one after the other, from Hanger 7 and sped with a Longsword escort toward the battleship. It was not wounded by any means; it was still pumping plasma rounds out like crazy, most of which had missed the station. Another barrage of plasma cut through the air like a hot knife through butter. The Major accessed the rear view screen on the control panel and watched as all four rounds crashed through Hangers 4 and 5. He scowled and grabbed hold of the strap that waved in the air above him. The Lieutenant that piloted the craft gritted his teeth as the boarding craft suddenly smashed into the Covenant battleship's shield. The pink bubble began to surround them as they fought slowly through; the collision with the shield had resulted in the total loss of velocity. Daren glanced to his left to find the same result for the other craft.

Finally, they punched through the shield and hooked up with their escort Longsword, who had not suffered a loss in velocity. They put the petal to the metal and came up alongside the bridge of the vessel. Through the windows of the bridge, Daren noticed Elites and Honor Guards lining the control panels. Apparently, Grunts and Jackals weren't good enough for bridge positions. It was like the Human military; everyone was classed, and everyone was always inferior, no matter whom they were.

They decelerated and pulled around the back of the bridge, and maneuvered carefully through the bay. Something wasn't right. "Wait! Abort! The lifepod is still attached to the ship!"

"No problem, Sir!" replied the pilot. He pressed a few buttons on his control panel and there was a grinding sound. The Lieutenant flipped the ship around gracefully and backed up ever so slightly. Outside, a boarding dock extended from the rear of the ship and latched hold of the lifepod. A holographic monitor appeared on the windshield, displaying the status of the operation. Floodlights snapped on inside the docking tube and several mechanized arms folded down. Attached to them were laser emitters. The arms focused into a circle and bounced back with recoil as the red-hot lasers initiated and began cutting a hole through the sheets of Covenant metal. The docking tube latched on to the lifepod and pressurized just as the hole was finished and

hit the metal floor of the lifepod.

"Excellent," replied the Major. "Launch docking tube number two; we can't depressurize the lifepod now; we'll connect with the other boarding craft and move in as one force."

"Yes Sir!" The Major turned around and slammed his fist on the metal inside of the small bay. All eight seats were filled with experienced Marines, those who were skilled at boarding enemy ships. The occasion rose very rarely, so those who specialized in that field gained their skills very quickly.

"Let's go; we've got a Covenant battleship to storm."

The Marines rose from their seats and set their shotguns to fully auto. The Major checked his pistol; locked, loaded, and cocked. He put it back in its holster. An alarm sounded and the second docking bay door slid open, eight men swarming the doorway, eager to slaughter the Covenant on their own turf. The pilot leaned back.

"Pressurization is fully complete. Have a good time, Sir." Daren snorted and bobbed his head to the Lieutenant.

"Let's go!" The first bay door slid open and the Major started down the length of the tube, his men following closely behind. He hopped through the round opening; the round metal plate that had been cut clanked against the floor. "C4," he said. A Marine stepped forward and knelt down in front of the lifepod bay door, taking a moment to set the timer for 10 seconds.

Before he touched the wires, he looked over his shoulder and said, "I recommend you all step back into the tube." Everyone shuffled back quickly and the Major waited for the Marine to touch the wires and retreat before retreating himself.

"Everyone look sharp; once that thing blows, we'll be in a fight before we know it." The C4 detonated, smashing through the door like nothing. Daren heard the screams of several Elites, and dashed through the door, shotgun at the ready. An Elite charged him and he raised the shotgun, firing a round into it's chest. It dropped to the ground with a grunt, then struggled to get back up. Daren pumped another round into it, then swiveled around to punch a shotgun shell through an oncoming Elite's head. The Marines, after watching the Major's superhuman feats, rushed through the blown doorway, smashing through the Elites. They attempted to fight back, but the Marines were too quick for them; the SPARTAN did the work of five Marines anyway.

"It's the Demon!" shouted an Honor Guard. Daren's head snapped up, and he raised the shotgun quickly as the Honor Guard ignited a plasma sword. He was too slow; he ducked under the blade as it hissed through the air, and then jabbed the shotgun into the unprotected gut of the Elite. He pumped off two rounds and the Honor Guard slumped down on top of him. He hurled the body off and it flew across the room and crashed into a cluster of consoles.

Daren took a moment to reload his shotgun; he looked around as he did so. The Marines were holding the only way out of the bridge, and were putting up a hell of a fight. The SPARTAN checked his roster. Not one

Marine had died, or even suffered a wound during the assault on the bridge. He made his way over to the door. The Covenant forces were pulling back.

Private Chase turned to him. "Sir, the Covenant patrolling the halls were alerted to our presence. It won't be long before the entire cruiser's on full alert."

"Damn it. We should have checked to see that the door was shut. None of these Covenant forces were armedâ€¦ What does that tell you?"

Chase's face twisted a bit as he thought. Suddenly it dawned on him. "That means almost none of the other forced onboard are armed!"

"Bingo. If their own _bridge_ wasn't armed to the max, what do you think the rest of their ship will be like? For the moment, we'll hold our position and try to figure out these computer systems. First one we need to find is the door-

Several Marines jumped from the doorway as it slid shut. The Major looked up to see one Marine fiddling with buttons. He glanced up and smiled coyly. "Sir, I've studied Covenant technology in my spare time; as a brig guard, you get a lot of free time. I looked up everything that our databases had on Covenant tech, new and old. After studying the symbols and their known meanings, I figured out what did what."

"What are you saying, Marine?"

"I'm saying, Sir, that I shut down every block of this ship, it's generators, and every damn power core. Even a light using a power core will be shut down. Which would you like me to do?"

"All of the above."

7. Marines Never Get To Have Any Fun

The Private holding great knowledge of Covenant technology had done some excellent work. Generators were offline, the engines had died and been drained, the shielding system taken offline, and the main guns disabled. After a short study, he had even locked the weapon distribution systems in the armory. _By now, the Elites must be going crazy_, the Major thought to himself. He paced around the bridge as the Marine worked through the Covenant databases.

"Sir," he said suddenly, breaking the uneasy silence. Daren stopped and turned on his heel. "I've found a databank _full_ of information on the Human forces as ofâ€¦ a week ago!"

"What?" The Major jogged over to the display.

"I'm going to attempt to translate it to English so that we can read it easily." He depressed a few of the glowing, holographic buttons on the control panel, and the English text began writing itself across the screen.

_The Human race has been battling our Covenant for years, and until

today we had not been able to find the jump coordinates of the filthy race's planet. The Prophet of Regret has just discovered the coordinates of their home world, this planet 'Earth,' and is currently making his way there with a small invasion force. It is our belief that he jumps into Slipspace blindly; there are no records of how many Humans could be awaiting the Prophet when he finally arrives at the coordinates listed. After we purge a Human-bound planet, Genalsus VI, we intend to jump through Slipspace and aid the Prophet of Regret in his hasty, yet remarkable, attack upon Earth. We shall forever be held by our Covenant; let us make our Prophets proud in our ability to exterminate the Human threat! We shall reactivate Halo!_

"That's all I can get that's useful, Sir. The rest is just weapons schematics and information about an AI construct dubbed 'Cortana.'"

"Can you tell me if information has been transmitted to another ship?"

"Yes, the system log is rightâ€| here."

"Tell me if the information on the construct has been transmitted." Daren leaned over the chair and memorized the translated words on the display before they disappeared.

"Uhâ€| Shit. There's a Covenant construct on the system. It's dormant, but if I access the part of the log that contains information on the UNSC construct, it'll activate and we'll lose control over _all_ of the system."

"Damn it," stated the Major loudly, slamming his fist on the control panel. It beeped and flashed several times, then returned to normal. "We need Thor. Activate a private comm channel with the station. Tell them to start storming the cruiser, and to try to avoid collateral damage. If we're lucky, we can use this cruiser to activate a Slipspace opening and travel to Earth for help."

"Yes, Sir." He depressed a few more buttons and began to relay the message. Daren turned around and motioned to Private Chase.

"You, me, hangers."

Chase saluted smartly. "Yes, Sir!" Daren picked up his shotgun and headed toward the doorway; the Marine at the console opened it briefly for Daren and Chase, and then locked it, creating a comm link with both men.

"We've got to do this carefully. I don't care if I kill Covenant, but if something poses zero threat to us, we ignore it, understood?" Chase nodded. "We're making a beeline for the hangers and such so that when the Pelicans get here from the station they'll have a clean way to the bridge and we can guide them as necessary."

They made their way down the hallway, silent save for the slight metal _pling_ sounds their boots made upon the pale purple floor. They rounded a corner and came face-to-face with a group of Grunts. None of them were armed and they scattered and waddled away. The Major switched his shotgun hand and reached for his pistol, cocking it by pulling back the hammer on one of the edges of his armor. He

aimed carefully and got six headshots, the Grunts flopping to the ground with little squeaks in a huge pool of blue blood. Private Chase kicked them out of the way and stormed down the hall, pumping two shotgun shells into an unsuspecting Jackal and continuing on. Daren continued to walk, looking on from behind with admiration at the Marine's willingness to go charging deep into the unknown annals of the ship.

Suddenly, the Marine came running back, waving his arms. "Sir! Run for your life!" Chase charged past him and Daren turned back to the hallway. He started; coming down the hall at full speed were four Elites, armed with plasma swords in each claw. Daren's eyes widened behind his metal faceplate and he turned on his heel and sped back the way he came. He accessed the comm channel with the bridge.

"Open the door! _Now!_" He rounded the corner and chanced a glance over his metallic shoulder. The Elites were hot on his trail and closing in fast. He dodged through the doorway and shouted out. "_Close it!_" The doors slid shut just as an energy blade hissed through the opening, grazing the Major's shields. Static washed over his display and he stumbled back a bit. The heavy titanium doors sliced through the energy and it popped off, disappearing into thin air with a small flash. Private Chase fell to the deck and attempted to catch his breath.

"Where the hell did that come from!" he shouted at the Marine manning the Covenant control panel.

"None of the doors have been forced open. All I can think of for an explanation is that they were in the hallway when I shut the doors down and they were armed," he responded.

"Yeah, we noticed that!" responded Chase.

"Calm down, Private," stated the SPARTAN standing behind him. "We're not dead, therefore there's no reason to worry." Private Chase sat rigidly with his legs sprawled out and checked his shotgun tediously. Daren moved over to the control panel.

"Sir, the station's sending five Pelicans in."

"Give them a heads up; I don't want those Marines to go in there without a clue as to what they could encounter. Tell them to set up a secure comm link with the bridge as soon as they land in the hangers." He turned to his men, who were no longer crowded around the doorway, as if it would open like a black hole and eat them alive. "We have to get rid of those Elites. It's dangerous, yes, but if we can hold them back with gunfire, I think I've got a plan that just might work." The Marines filled into single file lengths-way in front of the doorway and readied their shotguns. Daren leaned his shotgun upon a control panel nearby and left the holster for his pistol undone; he had a feeling he might need to gain access to it quickly. He then detached four frag grenades from his lower back and pulled the pins on two, holding the caps down.

He nodded to the man at the control panel and the door zipped upwards. The Elites, who had been standing directly across from the doorway, engaged their plasma swords and shrieked bloody murder. The line of Marines began to shoot and pump used shells from their shotguns faster than anyone had ever done before. The Major tossed

the grenades over their heads and then pulled the pins on the others, doing the same with them. He shouted and the doors slid shut. Two dull thuds, followed closely by a third and a fourth, echoed through the door and the Major pulled his pistol from its holster. He looked back to the man at the controls, and the door slid open once again. Daren raised his pistol instinctively, but no Elite came charging through the door. He slipped past a soldier and stepped lightly forward.

An unarmed Elite suddenly rounded the doorframe and ran, knocking him over, into the Major. His breath knocked from his chest and stomach, Daren hit the ground with tremendous force with an Elite's ugly mug pushed against his faceplate, roaring in rage. With his pistol still in hand, he shoved his metal boots into the Elites gut and kicked him off, scrambling up. He raised the pistol and two rounds burst from the backside of the beast's skull, causing a plinking noise as they thudded into the floor. The alien lay motionless on the floor and the Major grabbed a giant glob of blue blood that had attached itself to his chest armor, slanting his gloved hand sideways, allowing the goop to drop to the floor.

Behind him, a Marine exclaimed, "Aww c'mon Major! Us Marines never get to have any fun!"

End
file.